

The Sandpaper
by Maria Scandale

If any project is truly "shovel-ready," one would think it would be sand on the beach. But last week the White House Office of Management and Budget reportedly pulled funding for every beach re-nourishment project from the stimulus list requested by the Army Corps of Engineers. That triggered a typhoon of response from a nationwide beach restoration group, in addition to local concern from the Southern Ocean County Chamber of Commerce.

There are other federal funding hearings that come up each year during which lobbyists and congressmen fight for the shore among inland interests - but their point now is that the beach is more than worthy of the stimulus money.

"In 2007, beaches contributed \$322 billion to America's economy," the American Shore and Beach Preservation Association pointed out in a March 25 press release after hearing of the cuts. "More importantly, for every dollar the federal government spends on beach nourishment, it gets \$320 back in tax revenues. An Administration that is looking for more ways to bail out Wall Street firms that made bad investments is summarily rejecting one of the best investments of American taxpayer dollars, investments that directly benefit Main Street."

The bad news traveled fast - Chamber of Commerce Executive Director Rick Reynolds forwarded the press release to Congressman John Adler (D-3rd), and the same day Adler launched a letter to OMB Director Peter Orszag.

"The federal government cannot abandon the people of shore communities and the economic value shore businesses generate," Adler urged. "Beach nourishment projects are shovel-ready and have a proven track record of creating jobs."

Adler said in a SandPaper interview this week that the beach is "the lifeblood of the economy of the Island. If we're going to have the Island be healthy economically and environmentally a generation from now, we have to continue funding beach replenishment."

He added, "I will work with the White House to convince them that's necessary, or I will go around the White House and make sure we continue the funding through Congress. But either way, this is critical to Long Beach Island and Ocean County that we keep this program moving forward to save homes, to save businesses and to save the economy."

For the past 14 years, the sitting president has signed appropriations legislation that has included funding for beach nourishment projects. The difference this year is that the Recovery Act "put OMB in the driver's seat," said ASBPA President Harry Simmons.

The reason given for the rejection of beach nourishment funds is that "using Federal funds for periodic beach nourishment is contrary to Administration budget policy," Simmons said.

The ASBPA points to the Chicago Shoreline Protection Project - for which the federal government will pay \$192 million of the \$354 million cost - in saying, "We doubt that a President from a state that has one of the largest shore protection projects in the nation, or a Vice President from a state whose coastline is lined with sandy beaches that are favorite summer destinations of thousands of Washington-area residents supports such a wrong-headed policy."

Lobbying for beach management since 1926, ASBPA will argue from many angles for sustained engineering of the shore.

"Beaches are coastal levees," the press release said. "The lessons of Hurricane Katrina, Rita, Ike and others have been quickly forgotten by OMB, or never learned."

ASBPA is calling upon "every family that plans to go to the beach this summer, and every American who has ever gone to the beach" (and that has been two billion people every year) to tell the White House and Congress that beaches are important.

Adler told the OMB that the money included in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act is needed for beach erosion studies, building groins and jetties to protect beaches from surf, storm surge and tidal currents, and long-term nourishment efforts such as pumping tons of dredged sand back onto eroded beaches.

In checking with the Army Corps offices every day, Kathryn Prael, Adler's communications director, said the Corps had not yet received the final list of appropriations funds from the federal government as of Tuesday.

In the meantime, efforts to convince OMB will continue.

Adler said he would also be pursuing other avenues of federal funding for beach projects - most recently, beach nourishment funds came out of the Omnibus Appropriations bill.

"For that, I followed up where Congressman Saxton left off," Adler said of his predecessor. "So there are ways other than through the Economic Recovery Act to get money to the Island, and I'm going to make sure we use every means necessary to see that we get our fair share of federal tax dollars."

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